

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USMISSION GENEVA

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AMEMBASSY WARSAW

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

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UNCLAS STATE 215673

E.O. 11652:NA

TAGS: CASC, PFOR, VS

SUBJECT: AMERICANS IN SVN

UNCLASSIFIED

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1. FOLLOWING IS WASHINGTONPOST LEAD EDITORIAL SEPTEMBER 9;
REPEATED FOR YOUR INFORMATION.

2. BEGIN TEXT. VIETNAM: THE HOSTAGE GAME AGAIN?

--THE NEW COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM SEEMS TO BE HOLDING ABOUT 50 AMERICANS HOSTAGE TO WIN NOT ONLY DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BUT ECONOMIC AID. SOME OF THE AMERICANS - CHURCH PEOPLE, DESERTERS, INDIVIDUALS WITH VIETNAMESE FAMILIES-STAYED BEHIND VOLUNTARILY WHEN THE THIEU REGIME FELL IN APRIL; OTHERS WERE TRAPPED. MOST LIVE AROUND SAIGON BUT 10, INCLUDING TWO GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, THREE WOMEN AND A 5 YEAR-OLD GIRL, ARE IN CUSTODY IN THE INTERIOR. ALL ARE CUT OFF FROM COMMUNICATION WITH THE OUTSIDE. UNTIL EARLY AUGUST, AMERICANS WERE TRICKLING OUT. THEN SOUTH VIETNAM LOWERED THE GATE IN APPARENT REACTION TO THE AMERICAN VETO OF ITS APPLICATION FOR UNITED NATIONS MEMBERSHIP. SAIGON WAS EVIDENTLY NOT MUCH MOLLIFIED BY THE FACT THAT THE AMERICAN VETO WAS CAST FOR CONSIDERATIONS ENTIRELY EXTRANE- OUS TO SAIGON, WHOSE APPLICATION WASHINGTON SUPPORTED IN PRINCIPLE; U.S. OPPOSITION WAS IN PROTEST OF THE U.N.'S RE- FUSAL TO ADMIT SOUTH KOREA. THE OTHER DAY THE LAST AMERICAN CORRESPONDENT WAS EXPELLED. A BEPORT HE THEN FILED MADE PAINFULLY CLEAR THAT THE REMAINING AMERICANS ARE HOSTAGES TO RECOGNITION AND PAYMENT OF "DAMAGES."

-- THE OFFICIAL AMERICAN VIEW HAS BEEN THAT THE AMERICANS IN SOUTH VIETNAM SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO LEAVE ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS. TO THIS END WASHINGTON HAS SOUGHT TO PROD SAIGON THROUGH THE RED CROSS, UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER INTER- MEDIARIES. BUT THE REGULAR RESPONSE OF THE PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT IN SAIGON HAS BEEN THAT IT WOULD DISCUSS THE AMERICANS ONLY IN A PACKAGE INCLUDING POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS. WHILE THE STATUS OF THE AMERICANS WAS UN- CLEAR, THE UNITED STATES WAS CAREFUL NOT TO CONFIRM ANY VIETNAMESE TENDENCY TO REGARD THEM AS CHIPS FOR WHICH WASH- INGTON WOULD PAY IN POLITICAL BARGAINING. BUT IN THE LAST MONTH SAIGON APPEARS TO HAVE REACHED THIS POSITION ON ITS OWN.

-- SAIGON IS MAKING A BIG MISTAKE IF IT BELIEVES THAT THE FEW AMERICANS NOW IN SOUTH VIETNAM CAN SOMEHOW BE EQUATED, IN TERMS OF THEIR VALUE AS HOSTAGES, WITH THE LARGE NUMBER UNCLASSIFIED

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OF MILITARY POWS FOR WHICH THE UNITED STATES WAS WILLING TO "PAY" NORTH VIETNAM, WITH A "PEACE AGREEMENT, SEVERAL YEARS AGO. THE CONDITION OF INTERNAL AMERICAN DIVISION, WHICH ALONE MADE NORTH VIETNAM'S MANIPULATION OF HOSTAGES A FEASIBLE TACTIC, NO LONGER EXISTS. SAIGON SHOULD ALSO CONSIDER THAT NO SINGLE WARTIME POLICY OF HANOI'S BROUGHT UPON IT MORE POPULAR ANTAGONISM THAN ITS USE OF THE HOST- AGE ISSUE. WE SAY THIS NOT AS A THREAT TO SAIGON BUT MERELY AS A JUDGMENT OF THE CURRENT AMERICAN SCENE. THERE ARE SOME LEGITIMATE DIPLOMATIC AND MORAL REASONS WHY THE UNITED STATES OUGHT TO BE CONSIDERING THE NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS WITH SOUTH VIETNAM. REVIEWED VIETNAMESE USE OF A HOSTAGE TACTIC ASSOCIATED WITH THE UGLIEST DAYS OF THE

WAR PERIOD CAN ONLY SET THIS NECESSARY PROCESS BACK. END
TEXT. KISSINGER

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